

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Effects of Intergroup Dialogue: Public School Teachers and Sexual Orientation Prejudice

Dessel, A. B. (2010). Effects of intergroup dialogue: Public school teachers and sexual orientation prejudice. *Small Group Research*, 41(5), 556-592. doi:10.1177/1046496410369560

SUMMARY: A mixed-methods approach was utilized to examine the effectiveness of an intergroup dialogue intervention with 36 public school teachers regarding their attitudes, feelings and behaviors towards lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students and parents. Results indicate that the use of intergroup dialogue as an intervention method for increasing positive attitudes, feelings, and behaviors was effective.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Teachers who engaged in the intergroup dialogue intervention group experienced increases in positive feelings towards those who identify as gay or lesbian, perspective taking, and actual or intended behavioral changes.
- Teachers who participated in the post-intervention interviews discussed the importance of administrative support and training to increase confidence and competence to teach about LGB issues.
- Teachers feared repercussions from fellow teachers, administrators, and parents if they proactively taught about LGB issues.
- Interviewees discussed how having more opportunities for open dialogue, and a more diverse group in regards to gender and opinions could improve the intergroup dialogue intervention.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate with youth professionals to create a healthy and safe environment for military LGB youth and families
- Collaborate with other professionals in the field about ways to facilitate program activities that increase awareness about the unique issues LGB youth and families experience

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer workshops to Service members and community members who work with youth and families to discuss important issues LGB youth and families experience
- Educate teachers about how to create inclusive classroom environments for all students

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that support LGB Service members, children, and families
- Recommend partnerships among military-based and community-based programs that offer education and support for LGB youth and families

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METHODS

- Researchers presented information about the study to teachers at 18 schools in order to recruit participants. LGB community members were recruited through 16 local organizations.
- Intergroup dialogue intervention participants completed three 3-hour long structured sessions with 2-3 other teachers and 2-3 members of the LGB community; the comparison group was given reading materials.
- Both the comparison and intergroup dialogue intervention group completed pre- and post-surveys that assessed religiosity, attitudes and knowledge about LGB issues, critical reflection, perspective taking, and behavior.
- Ten teachers completed a post-intervention interview to elaborate on pre- and post-survey results.

PARTICIPANTS

- Thirty-six teachers participated in the study; 17 teachers were randomly assigned to the intergroup dialogue intervention group and 19 teachers were randomly assigned to the comparison group.
- The majority of participants in both the intergroup dialogue intervention group and comparison groups were White, female, and had a mean age of 44 years.
- Of the 10 teachers who completed the post-intervention interviews, all identified as White, five were male, and ages ranged from 26-56 years.

LIMITATIONS

- The post-survey was administered following the completion of the two-week intervention and had no following up, therefore long-term effects of the dialogue intervention were not assessed.
- The sample size was relatively small, limiting the type of analysis that could be conducted.
- Participants were recruited and chose to take part in the study, limiting the generalizability of results, as those who participated may have already been more open to discussing LGB issues than those who chose not to participate.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct more longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of an intergroup dialogue intervention for increasing positive feelings, attitudes, and behaviors towards LGB youth and parents
- Replicate the study with a larger sample
- Utilize a less structured intergroup dialogue intervention approach, as suggested by the participants in the current study, to allow for more engagement and conversation regarding LGB issues

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